

ordinary people would never imagine the market-rates inside jails. Two matchboxes bartered with a litre of milk!" comments Haque.

BREEDING GROUND FOR CORRUPTION

Whatever scope of being linked with productive labour was there in jails, Haque alleges, is diminishing. The prisoners used to grow some vegetables on jail plots to meet their daily requirements. Now the practice has been stopped. Other small-scale productions are on the verge of breaking down. "No supply; raw materials not available. No fats. No wool. So yarn. But yes, the Left Front has increased the daily wage from six annas to one Rupee. How happy the prisoners are! Yet, if these inmates are asked the government has fixed the minimum wage for eight hours labour at Rs 8.33. Why you, working for twelve hours, would not get even that rate? They reply—"their benevolence". Haque argues that deprived of human treatment and debarred from productive labour, the jail inmates are being forced to become hardened criminals.

Moreover, the system of making 'writers' as a gesture to 'loyal' prisoners and the 'prisoners' panchayats' are often manipulated by the authorities to serve their own interests. These are also breeding grounds of corruption. Santosh Nag's death in Dumdum jail is a typical example. He was reportedly trapped in this corruption ring and died in mysterious circumstances. According to Haque, the prisoners who became vocal after his death were silenced in various ways. Some were offered to be made 'writers' in the jail hospital. Asinat Ali, one of Nag's close friends and a convict for 14 years, was subjected to severe psychological pressure. He became "mentally deranged" and one day, his body was found hanging with a noose around his neck.

The most miserable life in jails is of the teenagers, some of whom have been arrested for petty crimes, and some for vagrancy. They are literally 'auctioned' to the 'writers' and other persons in authority, made their pages and become victims of their perverted sexual lust.

Some time ago, Haque, in a letter to the Jail Minister, alleged that the number of deaths of prisoners in jails in 1980-82 has been double the figure for 1970-76. "1 hey have died due to the lack of treatment and diet. Among many deaths, at least three can be clearly called murders"

He cites a tragic incident to show the behind-the-bar inhumanity. "The three-months old baby of Mala Das, a Naxalite woman prisoner in Baharampur jail who was arrested from Birbhum when she was three months pregnant, was left among prisoners brushing aside doctor's advice. When the doctors repeatedly asked "Where is the mother?", the curt reply of the jail authorities was "There is no permission from the Home Department; the mother cannot be brought here. . . [The child] died with a 'normal death' certificate around the neck. Merely due to the lack of nursing."

Efforts by the prisoners to draw the attention of the government and the public to these irregularities have been met with violence. On February 2, 1986, when some

political prisoners at Dumdum Central Jail were on hunger-strike to press for their demands, the jail superintendent with his 'force' cracked down on them at 8.30 pm and forcibly removed some sick prisoners. Uttam Sana, and undertrial political prisoner alleged in a letter that many books had been seized from them during the raid. He named seven books belonging to him: (1) Complete works of poet Sukanlo, (2) Works of poet Nazput, (3) Economics, (4) Civics, (5) Logic, (6) English Grammar, and (7) English primer. Although these were all checked and passed by the jail authorities, they were taken away and never returned. "Are undertrial prisoners prohibited from reading books?" he asks.

Apart from Azizul Haque, there are some other political prisoners whose health is in bad shape. Biswanath Chakraborty at Dumdum Central Jail (recently shifted to a government hospital) is living without eight ribs, reportedly a result of police beatings. Father, he had suffered from severe attack of tuberculosis. Gontam Chakraborty is im-

ANDHRA PRADESH

'Encounter' Killings: Aftermath of Supreme Court Judgment

K Balagopal

AT Arwal they killed them inside the compound of a library built in memory of Mahatma Gandhi. The abode of the Creator's consort named after the most recent prophet of *ahimsa* is a macabre place to take human lives in. In Andhra they used to kill them in far away forests or at least in the *banjars* of anonymous villages. Now they have started killing them inside populous towns, within the hearing of hundreds of people. They are killing them in high school grounds, in deserted temples, and on the bunds of tanks and canals.

After the Supreme Court dismissed Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee's (APCLC) petition on 'encounter' killings, there has been a perceptible increase, if not in the rate of killings (for that depends also upon how alert the prey are) then certainly in the brazenness of the killings. In May last year the Warangal police picked up two young men, Bhupati Reddy and Saraiah, sleeping at their advocate's house in the heart of Warangal town. With every intention of killing them, they nevertheless took them in a jeep far enough to reach the outer fringes of the Godavari valley forest, 54 kms from Warangal to be precise, killed them in the *banjar* lands of a village by name Narsapur and declared that they had been killed in an 'encounter' in the forests.

Contrast this with an 'encounter' killing that took place in Warangal this year, almost exactly one year after the Narsapur killing. The victims were two young men named Nageswara Rao and Ramakrishna; Nageswara Rao was a student of science and Ramakrishna was a student of a local polytechnic college. They had left their studies and were working as full-time organisers for a naxalite

police bullets inside his body. Samar Dey, another prisoner at the same jail, has both of his lungs severely damaged; He was allegedly wrongly treated during his detentions at Raigunge and Malda jails earlier. The disease was detected at a developed stage only after he was brought to Dumdum Jail. His condition deteriorated further since he was shifted to Alipur Central Jail Sebika Ranjan Thakur, another political prisoner serving a life-sentence at Medinipur Central Jail, is suffering from acute asthma and several other diseases.

It is not that the Left Front government is not at all concerned over the matter. While Sumantra Chowdhury, Inspector-General (Prisons), has been engaged to investigate about the conditions of the prisoners and the jails, Rajat Majumdar, Special Superintendent of the CID (Anti-Naxalite Cell), has been asked to find out whether the release of political prisoners could lead to "a resurgence of Naxalite activity in the state"

group. Their killing allegedly took place on a relatively deserted road that links Kazipet railway junction to old Warangal, by-passing the central part of the town. The road, appropriately in retrospect, is named Hunter road. I do not know whether it is a proper noun or somebody used to hunt foxes there in the past, for there is a residential locality by name Foxes' Hill nearby. In recognition of the onward march of civilisation, higher animal species are hunted there now. The police story is that the two youth confronted them with arms on this road during the midnight of May 20-21, and lost their lives in consequence, though nothing (as usual) happened to the policemen. The real story (again as usual) is quite different. Nageswara Rao was arrested on the evening of May 20 at about 7 pm from a house at Kazipet, and Ramakrishna at about 11 pm the same night from a house at old Warangal town. Where exactly they were killed is not known—the most commonly heard rumour is that they were gunned down inside the spacious compound of the Regional Engineering College, one of the bigger and more reputed institutes of technology in the country; since the campus was at that time closed down for the summer vacation and the only academic activity, if any, would probably have been a summer school in Holography or Thermo-elasticity or some such esoteric subject, attended by not more than a couple of dozen participants, there is nothing unbelievable about the rumour, however incredible it may sound to those who are new to the ways of the Andhra police. Indeed it would be quite in keeping with the black sense of humour acquired by the Andhra police, who have a special hatred of college

campuses for being 'hotbeds of extremism', to use their pet phrase. What is more than a rumour however is that the boys had eight evenly spaced bullet injuries in pairs from the hip upwards to the chest, one on the left and one on the right. This was noted by their relatives who were (for a change) given the bodies to be cremated.

Wherever and however they were killed, the police took the bodies and with a sadism unmatched except perhaps in Hitler's Germany, threw them outside the house of Nageswara Rao's elder brother who teaches in a local college, where Nageswara Rao himself was a student until he gave up his studies for what he believed was a higher cause. It is instructive of how heedless the police have become about the need to concoct at (east a remotely believable story of an 'encounter', that they neither announced an 'encounter' immediately nor asked immediately for an inquest nor took the bodies to a hospital for confirmation of the death and post-mortem examination. They merely dusted their hands and went home to sleep, and dream perhaps of the reward the Home Minister would soon give them. It was only on the morning of the 21st, after some passersby noticed the dead bodies and reported to the police, that they casually announced that there had, by the way, been an 'encounter' on Hunter road the previous night. It was not a hasty or hurried afterthought, but a deliberately contemptuous one, an ostentatious and studied display of the arrogance born of the immunity given them by the government of N T Rama Rao.

A disused temple for Siva further down that road was the scene of another 'encounter' killing on September 6. Shyamprasad, a BTech student of the Regional Engineering College, and Srinivas, a student of the Arts College, were arrested previously, tortured severely, shot dead and thrown in the temple compound. Of the two, it is undoubted that the police had no reason for killing Srinivas, who had been staying at home in his village, other than that he was arrested along with Shyamprasad, and left alive would have made an uncomfortable witness. (Not that anybody is likely to have examined him.) This category of incidental victims who are killed because they happen to be at the wrong place by mischance accounts for quite a few of the 'encounter' victims, it must be added.

A different dimension of the studied arrogance of the police was exhibited in Nizamabad district. The Radical Youth League had given a call for a bandh in the district on June 12 in protest against police atrocities. The papers of June 11 carried the news item that on the previous night, at 9 pm, the police surprised a group of activists sitting in a high school compound at the taluq headquarters town of Kamareddy; they were, allegedly, planning how to enforce the bandh of June 12. When the police came upon them they opened fire with weapons, which fire was returned by the police. The naxalites' aim, as always, was poor but the better trained policemen hit the target and killed one person, described as an 'unknown-naxalite'. This is not the first time, nor is it going to be the last, when an unknown and

unidentified person is killed by the police and is later described as a naxalite, in an act of post-mortem political baptism. Usually the identity is fixed by some leaflets or books found on the person; in this instance he is supposed to have had a dangerous foreign-made revolver with him, though he obviously did not know how to use it.

However, the entire story is open to question. The high school building is located in a busy part of Kamareddy, a prosperous taluq town on the 7th National Highway. The 'encounter' is supposed to have taken place at 9 pm, which is too early for the town to go to sleep. And yet, nobody in the vicinity had heard any exchange of fire that night. Obviously, the police had caught their victim and killed him somewhere else, brought the dead body to dump it in the High School compound, and invented the story of a conspiracy taking place there to enforce the bandh of June 12. The only authentic part of the story is a truly Freudian slip: in inventing the conspiracy, the police unwittingly revealed why they had killed the boy: it was to tell all concerned that if you try to have bandhs and hartals—or any agitation for that matter—against police atrocities, we are going to celebrate it by killing some more of you.

This was confirmed a few days later. In protest against the 'encounter' described above the organisers gave a call for yet another bandh of the district on June 25. In the early hours of that day, there was an 'encounter' on the outskirts of Nizamabad town itself, and a person by name Narayana was killed. The spot of the killing was the bund of a canal coming into the town. The confrontation was supposed to have taken place at 1.30 am, but workers of the pump house that is hardly 150 metres from the spot of the killing, and which works round the clock, heard no sounds that night and knew nothing of the alleged 'encounter' until they saw a police jeep roaming around the place at about 5 am on the morning of 25th. Moreover it is reliably learnt that the victim was actually arrested by the police a few days prior to the killing at a locality called Dubba in the town. He was obviously tortured for a few days, then killed and the body thrown on the outskirts of the town. In view of the bandh planned for the morning, the killing was quite literally a case of silencing protest with guns.

The absolute freedom given to the police by NTR's government is beyond all comprehension. Today there is no count how many armed policemen are roaming around the north Telangana districts, and the Eastern ghat forests of Visakhapatnam and East Godavari districts. The typical policeman hereabouts is not the idiotic bungler nor the pot-bellied and greasy specimen in khakhi affected by the occupational disease of sadism, popularised by films. He is mostly young and tough; he does not dress in khakhi but adopts protective colouring to match the need; he is not armed with the infamous 303 (butt of much ridicule at the hands of Police Commission reports for its inefficacy in killing people) but with an automatic weapon; he is subjected to none even of the temporary discomfiture of a

khakhi-clad policeman in the event of his killing somebody—on the contrary he is likely to get a handsome cash reward and a quick promotion in case he has killed somebody important enough. The best place to see him is at any taluq or district headquarters' town, at dusk on any day, as he walks into the police station or headquarters, picks up his automatic weapon, puts it in a bag hung from the shoulder, and walks out menacingly in the company of his comrades to get into a jeep that frequently has no number plate. You can then, if you have enough imagination, picture him roaming around the villages throughout the night, death in his heart and in his hands.

It will not require much persuasion to accept that this new creature is a menace not only to the naxalite activists but to the common people as well. Immunity from prosecution, a possible reward according to the identity of the victim, an automatic weapon at hand and the anonymity of plainclothes is a deadly combination. And there have been at least two incidents this year in which by 'mistake' persons other than naxalites were fired at, one of them fatally.

On New Year's day 1986, the police of Godavarikhani in the coal belt of Karimnagar heard that some naxalites had gathered in a miner's residence near the eighth incline; they went there immediately only to discover that the naxalites, if they had ever been there, had left. Instead they saw a young man walking briskly in the dark. They naturally took him to be one of the naxalites that had fled, and fired with their automatic weapons. He was hit and he fell. The police then discovered that far from being a naxalite, the injured youth, Jayaraj by name, was the son of a mining officer. They handsomely admitted their 'mistake', took him to a hospital, and saw to it that he, survived.

The youth had the good fortune of being an officer's son. But two days later, on January 3, a similar incident happened in Warangal district in which the victim, a poor young man by name Narsaiah, lost his life. He was walking past an armed outpost at Ootlamatwada in Gudur taluq of the Godavari forest along with a friend. The outpost police saw him, became suspicious, chased him and killed him. The Superintendent of Police admitted the next day that a 'mistake' had been committed (*not* in shooting down an unarmed person, but in shooting down an unarmed person who further happened not to be a naxalite); and paid compensation of Rs 2,000 to the family.

The 'encounters' tally has now reached 51 counting from January 1985. As the scene of the killing shifts more and more into the heart of populous towns, and the stories put out sound less and less credible and nonchalantly so, a desperate sense of helplessness is the first and most easy reaction. To protest seems like beating upon a wall insulated against sound by a vacuum of incomprehension on one side and the deafeningly senseless noise of what passes for 'politics' in this land on the other. Perhaps the democratic rights movement will soon have to adopt the *karmanyeva adhikaraste* philosophy of the Bhagavadgita.

We owe our freedom to the martyrdom of many known and unknown martyrs.

Bowing down to them and with a resolve not to allow their sacrifice to go in vain, Maharashtra embarked on a mission to bring in happiness and well-being in the lives of its inhabitants.

The State is marching towards establishment of social justice and equality by achieving allround development.

In doing so Maharashtra has always kept uppermost in mind unity and integrity of our country.

On this auspicious day of our Independence Maharashtra rededicates itself to the task of ushering in happiness and prosperity in the lives of its inhabitants.

**Directorate General of Information & Public Relations,
Government of Maharashtra.**
